

For millions of travelers, the magic of the iron horse persists: main station in Frankfurt and its vast switching yard

Living

COVER STORY

The Romance of Rail

For drama or for dreaming, the train is still the way to go

A cloud of steam crystallizes into ice at a platform in Siberia; an engine chuffs impatiently on a siding in sweltering Madras; an air horn blasts across an orchard in Provence. After a century and a half, the sounds of the iron horse remain the very special mood music of travel. The clickety-clack of wheels on track, the rasp and jerk of couplings as wagons round a sharp bend make hearts beat faster and imaginations accelerate. The melody of the rail has not lost its drama for millions of travelers—and dreamers—the world over.

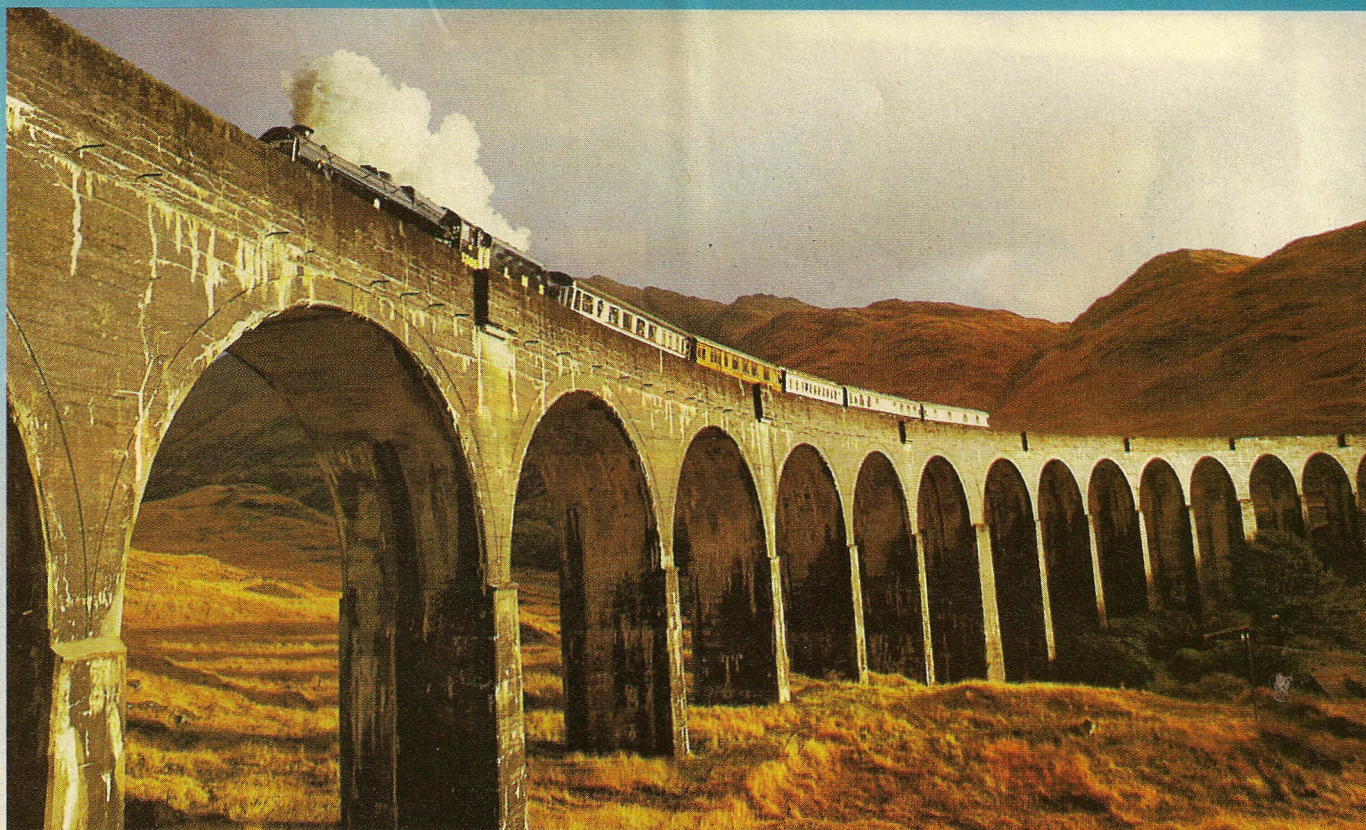
There is no magic like that of a train—one reason, no doubt, why railroads survive alongside more modern, and supposedly more convenient, forms of travel. Airplanes, often overbooked, land miles from city centers. Buses are, at best, merely basic conveyances. The car, once a symbol of the freedom to roam, all too often these days is a cramped waiting room in a traffic jam.

Milk run or express, steam or electric, the train has retained its appeal as the travel choice of millions. Indeed, that 19th century anachronism is being brought up-to-date in many countries. By 1991, the Deutsche Bundesbahn, West Germany's federal railroad, plans to offer 155 m.p.h. intercity express service, with trains that will feature such amenities as radio earphones, electric window blinds and interactive computers giving train information. British Rail is upgrading schedules, service and food to

attract business travelers who only a few years ago would have driven or flown to their destinations. The railroad's advertising slogan: "We're Getting There." Says British Rail Catering Manager David Sumner: "We're putting back the romance, the excitement into trains, and making it jolly good fun."

The world's 160-year-old fascination with the rail* is particularly surprising in those places where the iron horse is no longer an economic necessity. There, passenger cars all too often are shabby reminders of former splendor, service is remiss or absent, and schedules are irritating forms of fiction. The 2,846-mile journey across Canada from Toronto to Vancouver, for instance, was an efficient trip with fine dining and attentive service only 30 years ago. Today the voyage, which still takes about 72 hours, can be a grind of paper place mats and worn upholstery; it costs \$300, without meals, or \$80 more than an economy-class airline ticket for the 4-hr. 55-min. flight between the cities. In Japan, the government-owned Japanese National Railways, which ran up an \$11.5 billion deficit in fiscal 1985, will be privatized and divided into six passenger companies and one freight company later this year. Argentina's railroads are so troubled that the government will not even publish statistics about them.

*Regular passenger service, between Liverpool and Manchester, England, began in 1830.



Victorian décor, nouvelle cuisine and 16 brands of malt whiskey: the *Royal Scotsman* steams across the Glenfinnan viaduct in the Highlands

For many, however, the train is still the only way to go. In the Soviet Union, where most people do not own cars, some 218 billion passenger miles—a figure derived by multiplying the number of passengers by miles traveled—were logged in 1984, more than in any other country. Over 3 billion passengers rode the rails into every corner of India last year, 90% of them on the tiered, wooden benches of overcrowded second-class cars; many other passengers, known as the ticketless ones, rode precariously perched on the roofs of coaches. On a single holiday in China last year, a record 4.1 million people took the train to go visiting; the People's Republic expects a 70% rise in ridership by 1990 to something like 1.5 billion passengers annually. Taken together, the commuter lines of New York, Tokyo, London and Bombay deliver 9.5 million workers to their jobs each day.

But everywhere—whether the future is glum or rosy—the past is fascinating. Tens of thousands of railroad buffs from Bonn to Bangkok are dedicated to preserving and reliving former glories. In his bestselling *The Old Patagonian Express* (1979), American Novelist Paul Theroux spoke so glowingly of a rickety Argentine passenger-cum-freight train that hundreds of steam aficionados from the U.S. and Europe now come to ride it each year. The *Royal Scotsman*, which rattles through the Highlands from Edinburgh on three-day or six-day excursions that offer nouvelle cuisine and 16 brands of malt whiskey amid vintage decor, is fully booked each season. Buffs from all over the globe fly to Sydney to make the three-day journey through the Outback on Australia's transcontinental Indian Pacific; the world's longest stretch of curveless track, 297 miles across the forbidding Nullarbor Plain, is part of the trip.

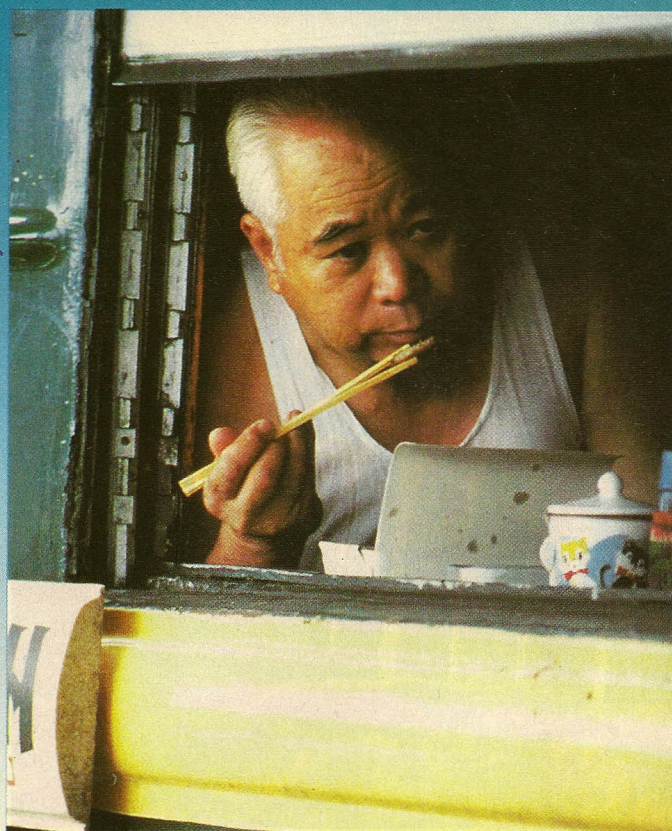
The diversity of contemporary working trains is remarkable. Travelers and would-be travelers can peruse Thomas Cook's timetable books, published every two months, that list more than 11,000 schedules the world over, from Burma to Brazil, Switzerland to Sri Lanka, Rwanda to Rumania. For a mere \$1.25, riders can head from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a distance of 48 miles at that point, on the creaky cars of a Panama Railroad local. For \$790 more, the superrich may dine in sybaritic splendor from

London to Venice on the restored carriages of the *Venice Simplon Orient Express*, which had its heyday in the 1920s and '30s. On Chinese trains, a cardboard container of rice and sautéed meat and vegetables, along with disposable chopsticks, is available for 40¢. A first-class ticket (\$40) between Butterworth, in Malaysia, and Singapore buys relaxation with music videos in the lounge car.

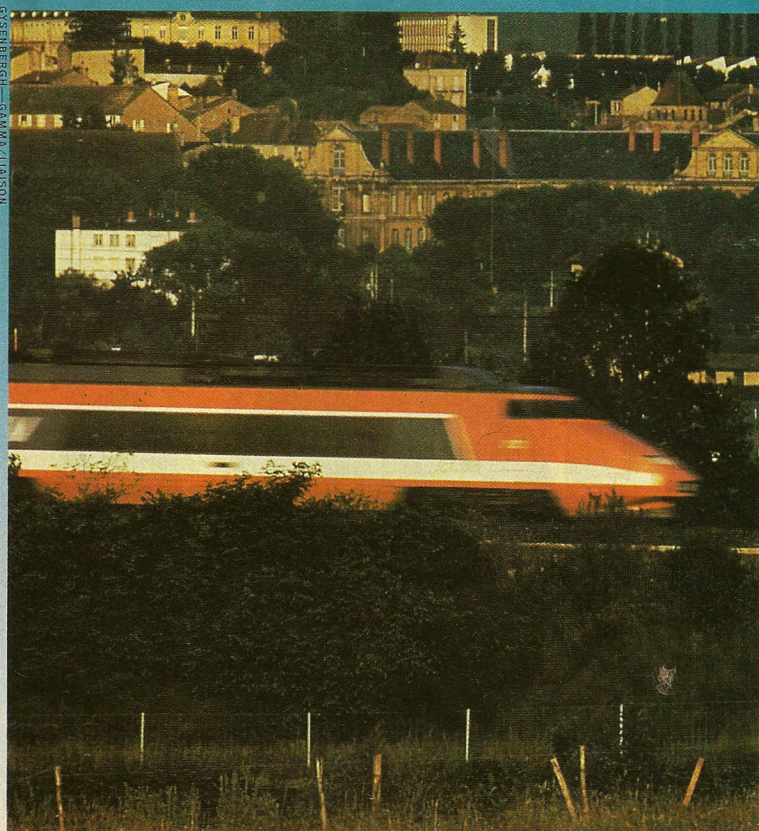
In contrast to the brisk, buckled-up anxiety of an airplane flight, a train trip is made vivid by one's fellow passengers. There is the easy camaraderie of a shared journey, the meal in the dining car, the conversation in a passageway, the glimpse into other compartments. There is the American student riding through Europe, pack on his back, Eurailpass in hand. There is the businessman buried behind some computer printout, looking as though he missed the last flight home. The mysterious blond in the dining car checks her watch for the 20th time. The loud and loving family in second class unwraps an aromatic lunch of cheese, sausage and fresh bread—or perhaps curry and chapatis. The newlyweds make a rare appearance outside their compartment; cameras appear at every stop.

A train ticket buys a front-row seat to the greatest show on earth: the human condition. Without suffering jet lag or driver fatigue, the passenger is a privileged pilgrim upon whom no demands are made and for whom time is suspended for a while in the rocking of the rail car. He is a witness to life, which passes in vivid vignettes just outside the window; he glides through the small moments that make a day. Backyards, open windows, city squares—nothing escapes the view. If he chooses, he can step down at any stop along the way to enter what he is observing.

There is no adventure quite like that promised by arriving in the middle of the night at a brightly lit station in a foreign country, where a customs officer is smoking a cigarette and a wagon stacked with milk cans rolls by. TIME's correspondents around the world have been charmed—and sometimes discomforted—by such journeys; following are six representative trips selected from their reports.



Relaxing on the rails: a Chinese rider enjoys a meal while sightseeing



One of France's Trains à Grande Vitesse, or TGVs, the fastest transportation



TRAIN A GRANDE VITESSE

Paris - Lyon
265 mi.; 2 hrs.
\$57

From its pointed beak to its fuselage-like carriages, an orange-, gray- and cream-striped Train à Grande Vitesse (high-speed train), or TGV, gives the impression of airborne motion. As the TGV pulls smoothly out of Paris' Gare de Lyon, newcomers, reclining in comfortable first-class seats, may reach for nonexistent seat belts. TGVs, after all, offer the world's fastest ride on rail, a subsonic service that may someday—if visionaries at the French national railways (S.N.C.F.) have their way—extend to other European capitals.

The TGV takes some getting used to. Passengers do not lean from the open windows of their compartments for a last breath of Paris air as the train heads for Lyon, whence it continues, on classic tracks at lower speeds, to such cities as Marseilles and Geneva. The windows do not open, and seating is airplane-style with a center aisle. The cars' improved trucks, or undercarriages, absorb noise and smooth out the ride so that the normal clickety-clack sound is replaced by an airy whoosh.

When the TGV reaches its specially built track at Combs la Ville, 18 miles

south of Paris, it accelerates to cruising speed—162 m.p.h., the world's fastest. The view from the windows is a series of quick snapshots: sheep, vineyards and farms blur by. To maintain velocity, the TGV skirts towns. Charming Burgundian villages are seen only at a distance.

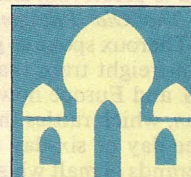
Convinced that high-speed train travel had a future because of crowded skies and highways, the S.N.C.F. began planning the \$1.62 billion TGV line in 1971. The gamble has paid off handsomely: some 1.5 million boardings are recorded each month. Businessmen, students, shoppers and vacationers ride TGVs. "We have changed the way people live," says Cécile Queille, an economist in the research and planning division of the S.N.C.F. "It has become normal to go to Paris for the day to shop. There are people who commute between Lyon and Paris to work."

A second TGV line is under construction to link Paris with Le Mans and Tours. Belgium, Holland and West Germany have joined the French in a planning group to extend a line, on compatible tracks, north through Brussels and Amsterdam to Cologne. Also in the planning stages is a Channel tunnel link that would convert the seven-hour boat-and-rail trip from Paris to London to an estimated three and three-quarter-hour commute.

Considering that intoxicating future, a passenger is grateful when a wineglass-shaped sign flashes on: THE BAR CAR IS OPEN. The wine (\$2.45 a half-bottle) and hot ham-and-cheese sandwiches (\$3) may

not win raves from gourmets, but the fare is better than on many trains. First-class passengers may enjoy four-course meals, like sautéed venison with chestnuts (\$23), served at their seats by stewards.

But celerity, not cuisine, is the point of the TGV. As it slows for the run into Lyon on regular tracks, the commuters aboard prepare to head home to dinner, and the shoppers collect their bags. In the not-too-distant future, travelers from Lyon may be returning from browsing at Harrods in London or working at jobs in Amsterdam. The S.N.C.F. foresees normal operating speeds of 186 m.p.h. on its Atlantic line by 1989.

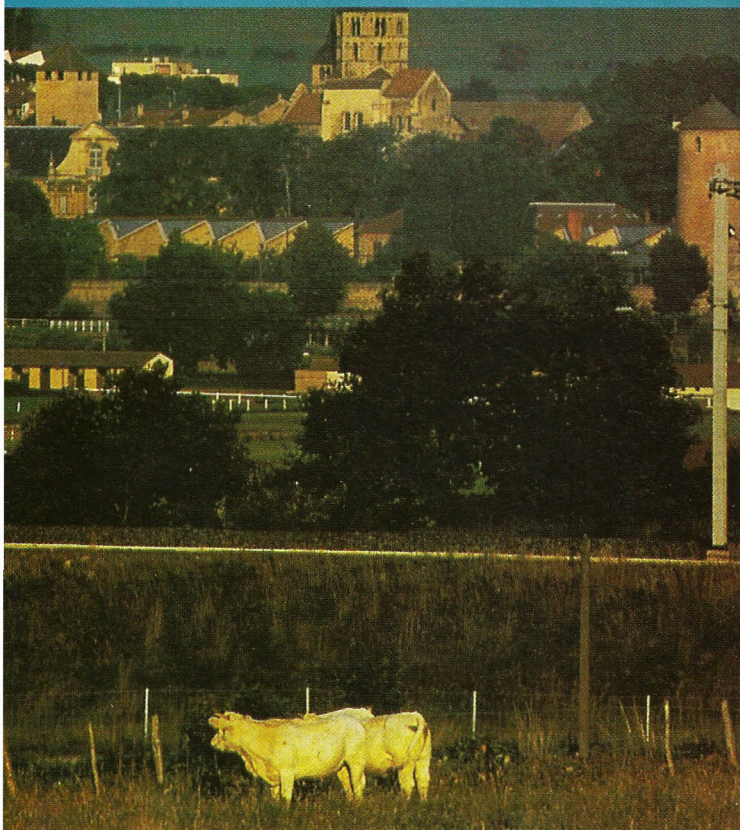


**PALACE -
ON - WHEELS**
New Delhi - Jaisalmer -
New Delhi
1,500 mi.; 7 nights
\$834

"I've always wanted to travel this way," says Leo Andrews, an attorney and train buff from Falls Church, Va., with a happy sigh. A scarlet-turbaned waiter has just served Andrews an expertly mixed cocktail in a crystal goblet. Andrews, his wife Susan and 96 other delighted passengers are gliding at a stately 24 m.p.h. through the sandy, treeless Thar Desert, some 150 miles west of New Delhi.

The *Palace on Wheels* in which they

*All prices are for first-class accommodations.



on rail, streaks past a Burgundian town at 162 m.p.h.



A staff member of India's *Palace on Wheels* leans out for a better view

are riding, a train of 13 painstakingly restored cars built for maharajas and British viceroys, is a glorious rolling hotel, one that inspires visions of jeweled thrones, luxurious hospitality—and the romantic days of the raj. Maharajas and their maharanis once used the coaches on such occasions as bridal journeys, hunting parties and state visits to one another. Each car carries the emblem of the princely state to which it once belonged.

As it has every week since 1982, from October through March, the *Palace*, drawn by an immaculate old steam engine called the *Desert Queen*, has pulled out of Delhi Cantonment Station to loop its way past the renowned historical sights and tourist attractions of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and back.

The pearl-white cars of the *Palace* provide extravagance in motion. The décor includes glowing Burma teak paneling, shimmering crystal chandeliers and rich brocaded fabrics. Passengers gather in paneled parlors to lounge on velvet-covered Victorian divans and chairs; there is even a library. A well-trained staff of turbaned and liveried khidmatgars, or attendants, stands by, ready to dispense royal hospitality from well-stocked bars and kitchens.

Quaintly, the *Palace* is not air-conditioned against sweltering days, but the full-size beds in the sleeping compartments—for two as well as for four passengers—are covered with satiny quilts for the cool desert nights. Each coach has two

white-tiled bathrooms and hot-water showers.

Breakfasts—American, Continental or an Indian repast consisting of bread and fried vegetables—are served in the coaches. For lunch and dinner in the two dining cars, beneath slowly spinning fans, the train's chefs offer fiery curries, chapati, *pullao* (fried rice) and less spicy Western fare like roast chicken and mutton. Three meals a day, plus high tea, are included in the fare; drinks are extra.

To relieve the monotony of rolling perfection—most traveling is done at night—the train stops at tourist sites. The trip, arranged by Indian railways in collaboration with the state of Rajasthan tourism department, includes camel rides over the dunes at Jaisalmer, where visitors see an 800-year-old stone citadel and exquisitely carved Jain temples. There is an excursion by elephant to the ruins of Amber Fort, outside the pink-hued city of Jaipur, and a stop at Bharatpur, site of India's largest bird sanctuary. Passengers also visit the ancient city of Udaipur, with its serene white marble palace, now a luxury hotel, built in the waters of Pichola Lake.

Before the train heads back to Delhi Cantonment, there is the obligatory stop at Agra, the site of the Taj Mahal. The travelers find the edifice memorable, but after a few days of touring on the opulent *Palace on Wheels*, some of the passengers may be wondering why such architectural perfection does not move.

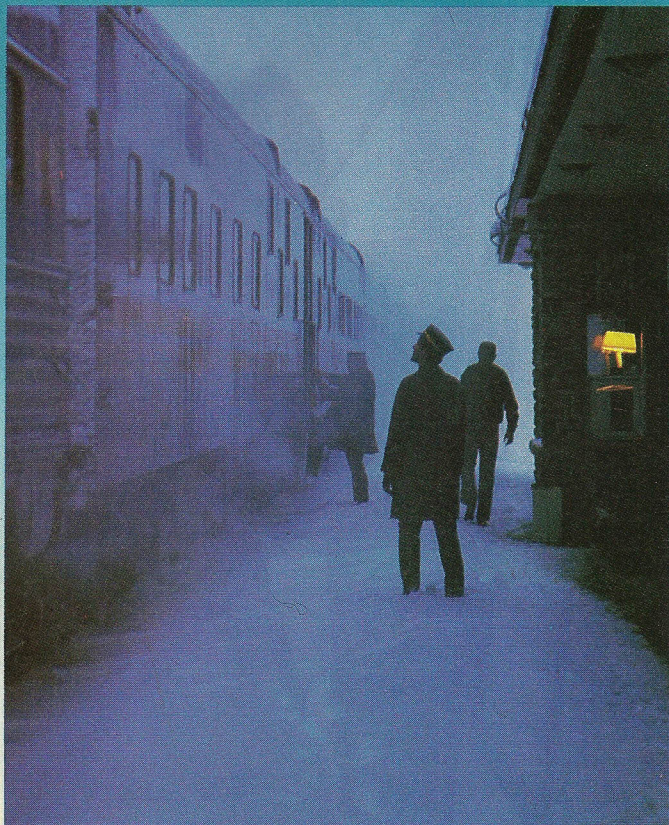


**THE
CANADIAN**
Vancouver - Toronto
2,846 mi; 72 hrs.
\$300

Look!" says the boy with his nose pressed to the window in the observation car. "Reindeer!" Actually, the animals are elk, burying their muzzles in deep snow to graze. Two bulls, enormous antlers adorning their heads, and several cows regard the slowly moving train with the tolerant indifference of locals dealing with tourists. This, after all, is the elk's wilderness home in the Canadian Rockies, and the iron horse is merely a momentary intrusion.

When the *Canadian*, nine silvery cars drawn by a blue-and-yellow diesel engine, pulled out of the Pacific Coast city of Vancouver at 3:30 p.m. the previous afternoon, travelers could only imagine what lay ahead: one of the world's most breathtaking rail journeys. On the first leg of its transcontinental trip to Toronto, the crack express of VIA, the passenger division of Canada's national rail line, crosses spectacular mountain ranges en route to the prairie city of Calgary.

On board are about 150 passengers, including skiers headed for the slopes, a few businessmen and a number of train buffs. "It's going to be a great trip," says Rod Oulds, 41, a Vancouver engineer who



The *Canadian* makes a snowy stop in the Rocky Mountains near Banff



Across seven time zones, two continents and several cultures: north of

is vacationing with his wife and two children. "It costs about the same as it would to fly, and we get a wonderful ride through the mountains."

During the night, the train passes the village of Craigellachie, B.C., where the final spike was driven in 1885 on Canada's first transcontinental rail link. Travelers can reflect on past glories—and their absence—in the dining car. Long gone are the starched table linen, heavy silverware and impeccable service of the *Canadian's* heyday early in the century; economy is the word for a train that is part of a rail system that is losing money. Now microwaved salmon and pot roast are ineptly served; instead of linen tablecloths, there are place mats. Why, then, take the train? Says homeward-bound Calgary Businessman Lucas Ward, 55: "I've had all the airports I can handle for a while."

In the morning, the 24 seats of the glass-domed observation car begin to fill up for dramatic vistas of the Selkirk Mountains, a vast, virtually uninhabited region of British Columbia where towering peaks thrust up from silent, pine-forested valleys. "Oohs" and "Ahs" are the only words spoken during a 33-mile stretch of track on which the train climbs nearly 1,500 ft., rattling over eleven bridges and crossing the foaming Kicking Horse River seven times.

When the *Canadian* stops at Banff, a winter resort high in the Rockies, the skiers happily disembark, while other

passengers step off for a while to enjoy the sun that is burning down on the snow from a bright blue sky. Granite mountains soar 9,000 ft. above the almost-mile-high town. A mother and her two daughters try to make snowballs of the crisp, dry powder at trackside; Japanese newlyweds pose on the platform, photographing each other. Two hours later, after the train has descended to the vast prairie for its run into Calgary, Frank Monaghan, a railroad buff from Chicago, says, "My wife can't understand why I want to ride some trains, but she can understand why I wanted to make this trip."



**TRANS -
MONGOLIAN
EXPRESS**
Peking - Moscow
**5,581 mi.; 6 days
\$252**

When ten green cars jerk to life in the Peking railway station, the neophyte may wonder why, among knowledgeable travelers, this is considered *the* train ride. The equipment is ordinary; the scenery promises to be dramatic but bleak: brown hills in China, the wastes of the Gobi desert in Mongolia, finally the frozen taiga of the Soviet Union.

In a way, the trip is something of a character-building endurance test, a journey that spans seven time zones, two con-

tinents and several cultures. Part of the reason for the train's fame, apart from the immense distance covered, is that a week on the *Trans-Mongolian* can be an often humorous seminar in the realities of Communism and a traveling definition of the word comrade.

As the express, which leaves the Chinese capital every Wednesday, rumbles alongside the Great Wall, the first lesson becomes clear for anyone who may have doubted it: there *are* class distinctions in supposedly classless societies. On a recent trip to Moscow, one of the deluxe-class compartments, with brass fittings and lace curtains, was occupied by a pair of Queen's Messengers carrying documents to the British embassy in the Mongolian capital of Ulan Bator.

In "soft," or first, class, the double sleeping compartments with adjoining cold-water sinks and showers contained Western tourists as well as an intense emissary of the Palestine Liberation Organization who spent much of the trip staring at his briefcase. In "hard," or second, class, were a homeward-bound Polish circus troupe and numerous Chinese who routinely emerged from their four-to-a-cabin accommodations to perform Tai Chi exercises on the platform during a stop.

Throughout the trip, Chinese stewards keep the carriages clean and make certain that no travelers are left behind during stops. (On this particular journey, one of the stewards appeared each eve-



Peking, the *Trans-Mongolian Express* heads for Moscow



Future shock: Japanese bullet trains lined up outside a station

ning with dumplings, which he shared with some of the passengers.) The food in the dining car is limited in variety but adequate; a meal of *solianka* (fish or meat soup) sells for about \$2. Once the *Trans-Mongolian* enters the Soviet Union, travelers supplement the train food by buying vegetables, ice cream and pastries at kiosks that open their shutters as the express pulls into stations. Because of Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev's antidrinking campaign, alcoholic beverages are no longer sold on board. Thus the thirsty Polish circus performers bought beer by the case during stops. After the train enters the Soviet Union, the dining car keeps Moscow time, serving dinner when most travelers are barely ready for tea.

In the freezing temperatures of Siberia, passengers don layers of clothing to pass from car to car to socialize in the dining car. As the train moves alongside 395-mile-long, ice-choked Lake Baikal, a passage that consumes half a day, foreign and Soviet travelers warm up with a bit of their own vodka and complain about the menu—*solianka* was on the card, but a few rubles slipped to the chef brought entrées that were officially "unavailable." The passengers exchange the latest gossip: a waitress is having an affair with a circus clown. A traveler who finally beds down in a Moscow hotel after six days on the rails has a few new friends, a host of unforgettable memories—and one problem: she cannot get to sleep because the bed is no longer gently rocking through the night.



**SHINKANSEN
(BULLET TRAIN)**
Tokyo - Osaka
343 mi.; 2:56 hrs.
\$118

When Tokyo Businessman Minoru Kimura, 56, boarded the 10 a.m. *Hikari*, or superexpress, for a 1:30 p.m. meeting in Osaka, he felt absolutely no apprehension about being late. After all, as his fellow Japanese like to point out, you can set your watch by the speeding bullet trains that streak across the country at up to 144 m.p.h.

This ride would deliver Kimura into Osaka at 12:56 p.m. The high-speed run linking Japan's two leading cities—and *Shinkansen* service elsewhere in the country—has become as commonplace as a subway or commuter-train trip, noteworthy to old hands only for its utter dependability. "It is," says Kimura, "a business train now."

As Kimura settles down in a reclining first-class seat, the 16 blue-and-beige cars pull out of Tokyo Station behind a streamlined electric engine that looks like an intercontinental missile. Kimura reads his morning newspaper while hundreds of other "salarymen," who make up the majority of the passengers, peruse documents and computer printouts. The train's only sound is a nearly inaudible rush of air, accompanied

by a slight, sleep-inducing vibration.

By the time the conductor has punched Kimura's ticket, the *Shinkansen* is flying on its specially built tracks past factories, blue tile-roofed houses and apartment blocks on the outskirts of Tokyo. Rice fields, barren after the harvest, appear outside the windows like postcard views for tourists. A digital display in the car shows a speed of 106 m.p.h., average for the run. A blue-uniformed attendant makes her way down the aisle selling green tea (65¢) and *obento*, or box lunches (\$6.50), from a cart.

"I see Fuji-san!" Haruko Tanaka, 3, on her first bullet-train ride, shatters the quiet with a delighted cry. Even the businessmen look up from their reading to regard snow-capped Fujiyama, a national symbol, rising through a distant haze. It is the sole spectacular sight in the virtually unbroken megalopolis that stretches south to Osaka.

Although France's TGV is faster, bullet-train service heralded the beginning of rail's high-tech age. When it was inaugurated in 1964, the *Shinkansen* was, along with the Tokyo Olympics of that year, a symbol of the new Japan, a country rebuilt from the ruins of World War II. Since then, *Shinkansen* has carried 2.4 billion passengers over a distance equal to 1,238 round trips to the moon—without a major mishap. Newer high-speed lines extend from Morioka in northern Honshu to Hakata on the southern island of Kyushu. There are 138 daily



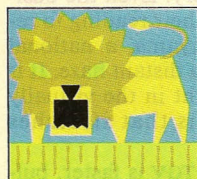
Impeccable service, historic menu: staff on the Mombasa line



Nostalgia deluxe: haute cuisine and scenery on the *Orient Express*

trains on the Tokyo-Osaka run alone; they carry more than two-thirds of all *Shinkansen* passengers.

As *Hikari No. 5* pulls into Shin Osaka station precisely on time, the salarymen close their briefcases and stretch, readying themselves for an afternoon of meetings. Katsumi Tosu, a Tokyo housewife traveling to visit her parents, says that riding the bullet train is an "everyday thing." Perhaps, but her seven-year-old son Fumitsugu, who still has his nose pressed to an upper-level window of a newly introduced double-decker car, is clearly enchanted with speed. Says he: "I like riding on top!"



**MOMBASA-
NAIROBI
EXPRESS**
331 mi.; 13 hrs.
\$21

"It was the real Africa, vast grass plains and the mountains in the distance and then an incredible wealth of game . . . right beside the train."

In the 73 years since Isak Dinesen, the Danish author of *Out of Africa*, wrote about riding the Mombasa-Nairobi Express, the number of wild animals may have diminished, but the romance remains. Today's travelers can still view the snow-capped peak of Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, and the sweeping

Athi Plain, where zebras graze. The voyagers may even spot the occasional Masai warrior, dressed in a red *shuka* and carrying a spear, striding calmly across the grassland, a vision from another Africa. As the 15 carriages rumble along at an average 28 m.p.h., the real destination seems to be nostalgia.

Two expresses a day travel the route in each direction, between Nairobi, Kenya's capital, and the sultry port of Mombasa, once a slave-traders' haven. As the sky turns gold at dusk, travelers on the westbound evening run, mostly tourists, find echoes of Dinesen's day. A steward announces dinner by walking through the cars sounding chimes. Seated amid weighty silverware at tables covered by thick white tablecloths, one can imagine Winston Churchill or Ernest Hemingway ordering a meal. Much of the menu, in fact, has not changed since the turn of the century: curried mutton and rump steak with stewed vegetables (\$4) are favorite choices. Outside, the pure dark of the African night, unmarked by lights or even camp fires, produces a phantom chill. The roar of lions seems to echo behind the chuffing of the engines.

The express is a vestige of colonial times, when the railway was launched by the British in 1896 to control the Nile Valley and destroy the slave trade; the route soon became the main access channel for European immigrants eager to settle in the wilds of Masailand. At one point during construction, lions killed 28 of the In-

dian laborers who laid the track. The survivors refused to work for three weeks. In 1900 a lion climbed into a train at Kima Station and dragged off and killed a railway official.

At dawn the traveler feels caught in a time warp as a picture-book Africa unfolds. The air is clear and cool, the light razor sharp. Elephants, giraffes and ostriches move across land unmarked by human habitation. A steward brings tea to the compartments; an English-style breakfast of cereal, sausage, bacon, eggs, toast, marmalade and coffee or tea (\$2.50) follows in the venerable dining car. As the train pulls into Nairobi station after its journey through the past, the spell is rudely broken: the jarring sounds of music on loudspeakers, yelling taxi drivers and blaring horns return the passengers to the urgency and tension of the present.

For a willing traveler, all trains chug through the same fascinating landscape—the country of the heart. A voyage by rail in this age of supersonic speeds, near instant telecommunications, precooked dinners and cash-card machines is a journey inward—and backward: an invitation to unwind, ruminate and enjoy. The traveler looks from his window at a small platform. The stationmaster's wife is laughing at a joke he cannot hear, but he smiles anyway at the sheer pleasure of the moment.

—By J.D. Reed.

Reported by B.J. Phillips/Paris, Peter Stoler/Vancouver and James Wilde/Nairobi, with other bureaus